

Witness Statement

Name: Peter Ryan

Occupation: Retired

1. This statement sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding as a witness.
2. This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

A. My background

3. My name is Peter Ryan. I am a retired South Coast Regional Manager for Illawarra Mutual Bank. I have lived in Batemans Bay since 1983.
4. Since November 2023, I have been the Chairperson of the "Don't Close Batemans Bay Emergency Department Committee" (**the Committee**).

B. First knowledge of the proposed new hospital at Moruya, NSW

4. In around mid-2020, I became aware through word of mouth in the local community that NSW Health proposed to construct a new hospital at Moruya which became known as the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital. Through those discussions, I became aware that the proposed new hospital was to include a Level Four Emergency Department.
5. At that time, I was not aware of any proposal to close the Emergency Department at Batemans Bay Hospital.

C. First knowledge of the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department

6. In around early to mid-2021, I attended on my General Practitioner, Dr Andrew Gibson, for a check-up. During the consultation, Dr Gibson mentioned that NSW Health was proposing to close Batemans Bay Emergency Department once the new hospital was opened at Moruya. To the best of my recollection, this was the first time I became aware of the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department.



7. Following my consultation with Dr Gibson, I had a discussion with my wife, Kim Maree Ryan, who was at that time employed as Registered Nurse at Batemans Bay Hospital. She advised she was aware of the possible closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department.
8. In around September 2023, I had a conversation with members of Batemans Bay Hospital Auxiliary Ann McClintock, Christine Hayes, Jan Fazakerley and others and Dr Gibson about the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department. Following this conversation, I decided to take steps to ascertain whether the broader local community was aware of the proposed closure. In doing so, I had discussions with members of the community, including discussions at the Batemans Bay Golf Club, about the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department. In each of those discussions, those I spoke with were not aware of the proposed closure of the Batemans Bay Emergency Department until I informed them about it.

D. Initial community meeting and formation of committee

9. On 27 November 2023, I called a public meeting at the Batemans Bay Soldiers Club to alert the local community of the proposed closure. The meeting was advertised in the local newspaper, on local radio, in flyers displayed in business windows and on a new Facebook page called "Don't Close Batemans Bay Emergency Department".
10. At the meeting, I outlined the NSW Health proposal and presented statistics obtained from the NSW Health website about the volume of patients attended to at Batemans Bay Hospital Emergency Department over the past 10 years. Approximately 430 people attended the meeting.
11. Within a week of the initial community meeting, I established the Committee. The Committee is comprised of myself as chairperson and ten community members:
 - a. Dr Gibson,
 - b. Ann McClintock, President of the Batemans Bay Hospital Auxiliary,



- c. Auntie Valentine Wright,
- d. Allan Bright, retired Public servant
- e. Christine Hayes, member of Batemans Bay Hospital Auxiliary
- f. Jan Fazakerley, Secretary Batemans Bay Hospital Auxiliary
- g. Malcolm Husband, self employed plumber & concerned resident
- h. Ken Bellette, self employed builder & concerned resident
- i. Greg Smeaton, retired NSW Forestry manager
- j. Caroline Harding (has since resigned due to carer duties).

12. The purpose of the Committee is to:

- a. Keep the community informed on our progress and other relevant information that comes to notice,
- b. Campaign to keep Batemans Bay Hospital Emergency Department open 24/7,
- c. Plan and agree on any action,
- d. Assist and collect Petition signatures,
- e. Communicate with relevant politicians for support, and
- f. Communicate with Southern NSW Local Health District for both clarification and support to keep Batemans Bay Hospital Emergency Department open.

13. The Committee usually meets on a fortnightly basis or as progress or discussion items require. The Committee communicates by messenger and email between meetings.

E. Preparation of petition to NSW Parliament

14. In around December 2023, I started a petition to the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly titled "Don't Close Batemans Bay Emergency Department" (**the Petition**). The

Petition stated:



To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

PETITION – Batemans Bay Hospital Emergency Department

I support the Batemans Bay Hospital Emergency Department continuing to operate 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

The NSW Government has determined to close the emergency department at Batemans Bay hospital – by signing this petition you indicate your objection to that proposed closure.

15. Whilst collecting signatures for the Petition, I spoke to thousands of locals from Batemans Bay. Beyond a small group of a Moruya based group called “One Eurobodalla Hospital Level 4”, not one of the people I talked to was involved in any consultation process concerning, or was otherwise aware of, the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department, unless they had heard about it through the community meeting I held on 27 November 2023.

D. Meetings with State and Federal Members of Parliament

16. On 31 October 2023, I met with the Member for Bega in the NSW Legislative Assembly, Dr Michael Holland MP. The purpose of the meeting was to inform Dr Holland that I had been gathering information from NSW Health website supporting Batemans Bay Hospital Emergency Department remaining open 24/7 in addition building a large support base of concerned local residents. I also had a number of questions on a typed sheet which I wanted answered:

- a. The new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital will be completed in approximately 2026. What is planned for the Batemans Bay Hospital when the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital opens?
 - i. Will it close (all services) and when?
 - ii. Will the Emergency Department and services remain at Batemans Bay 24/7?
 - iii. Do you support Batemans Bay Emergency Department remaining open 24/7 after the opening of the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital?

- b. Is the recently announced new “Medicare Centre” to operate 8am – 10pm expected to replace the Batemans Bay Emergency Department when the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital opens?
 - c. Will Batemans Bay Hospital Emergency Department close once the new Eurobodalla Hospital opens?
 - d. Ambulance Service;
 - i. What is the expected impact on Ambulance service in Postcode 2536 when the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital opens?
 - ii. Will there be more ambulance vehicles and staff – what are the expected numbers?
 - e. Any other comments?
17. Dr Holland stated: “I was wasting my time” campaigning against the hospital closure. Dr Holland would not answer my questions at the meeting but requested that I email the questions to him instead. I emailed him the questions and followed up a number of times. After approximately eight weeks, I received a letter from Ryan Park, the Minister for Health. I did not receive a response from Dr Holland.
18. Exhibited before me is a copy of the undated letter from Mr Park bearing the reference “M23/5389” marked “A”.
19. I also attempted to schedule a meeting with the Member for Gilmore in the House of Representatives, Fiona Phillips MP. Despite my efforts over a 3-month period, I was unable to secure a meeting with Ms Phillips.

E. Meeting with representatives from Southern NSW Local Health District

20. On 6 December 2023, the Committee met with Margaret Bennett, Chief Executive of Southern NSW Local Health District, Brad Scotcher, General Manager of the Coastal Network of Southern NSW Local Health District, and Dr Stuart Stapleton, head of the Emergency Department at Moruya Hospital.



21. When I left the meeting, I felt that the attendees from Southern NSW Local Health District had not been interested in hearing from the Committee about the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department and that they wanted us to cease our campaign and support the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital. I formed this impression from:
- a. Comments by Dr Stuart Stapleton who, when questioned on a known resuscitation the previous day, criticised the skill level of the current doctors and nurses working in the emergency department and “the lack of vital equipment”.
 - b. Comments by Margaret Bennett asking us to “all get on board with the new hospital and understand its benefits”.

F. Further community meetings

22. On 16 January 2024, Southern NSW Local Health District held a community meeting at Batemans Bay Soldiers Club to provide a Eurobodalla Health Update about the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital and Batemans Bay Community Health. Approximately 300 people attended. They confirmed to attendees that planning was to close Batemans Bay Hospital and the Emergency Department when the new Eurobodalla Hospital opened.
23. On 20 June 2024, the Committee held a community meeting at Batemans Bay Soldiers Club to provide an update on the progress of our campaign. Approximately 340 people attended the meeting.
24. The following guests were invited and attended:
- a. Margaret Bennett, Chief Executive of Southern NSW Local Health District,
 - b. Brad Scotcher, General Manager of Southern NSW Local Health District,
 - c. Dr Michael Holland, Member for Bega,
 - d. Fiona Phillips, Member for Gilmore, and
 - e. Mark Speakman, NSW Opposition leader.



25. The Petition was presented to and accepted by Mr Speakman. After the Petition was presented, Ms Bennett, Mr Scotcher, Dr Holland and Ms Phillips left the meeting. Committee members Malcolm Husband and Ken Bellette recorded the meeting on their telephones.
26. On 24 July 2024, Southern NSW Local Health District held a community meeting at Batemans Bay Soldiers Club. Approximately 40 people attended. The meeting was held to provide an update on progress of the building to date. Dr Holland, Ms Bennett and Mr Scotcher spoke about what they viewed as the benefits of only having one Hospital in the Eurobodalla Shire. I do not believe any minutes were recorded.

G. Tabling the Petition to NSW Parliament

27. On 25 April 2024, the Petition was closed with approximately 18,000 signatures.
28. On 20 June 2024, the Petition was tabled in the Legislative Assembly of the NSW Parliament.
29. On 29 July 2024, I met with:
- a. Natalie Ward, Deputy Leader of Opposition,
 - b. Damien Tudehope Shadow Treasurer,
 - c. Mark Speakman, Leader of the Opposition, and
 - d. Kellie Sloane, Shadow Minister for Health.
30. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss our concerns for the health of our local residents and confirm their support for our Petition and campaign. A commitment was given to support our campaign and to prepare to discuss the Petition signatures in the Legislative Council. I do not believe any minutes were recorded.



H. My current knowledge about the closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department

31. I am not aware of any proper consultation with Batemans Bay residents about the closure of the Hospital or Emergency Department. There is plenty of statements around a campaign to have a new Eurobodalla Hospital Level 4 but, never was it mentioned that as a "trade off" Batemans Bay would lose this valuable service.

Signature:



Name:

Peter James Ryan

Date:

8th August 2024